

2007

## Kunapipi 29 (1) 2007, Contents, Editorial

Anne Collett

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### Recommended Citation

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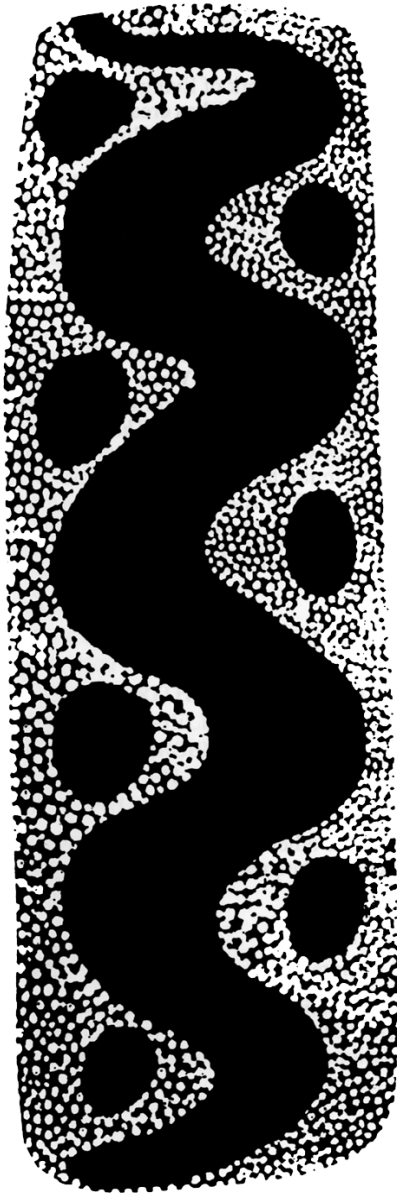
## Kunapipi 29 (1) 2007, Contents, Editorial

### Abstract

Kunapipi 29 (1) 2007, Contents, Editorial

# KUNAPIPI

Journal of Postcolonial Writing & Culture



VOLUME XXIX NUMBER 1  
2007

*Kunapipi* is a bi-annual arts magazine with special but not exclusive emphasis on the new literatures written in English. It aims to fulfil the requirements T.S. Eliot believed a journal should have: to introduce the work of new or little known writers of talent, to provide critical evaluation of the work of living authors, both famous and unknown, and to be truly international. It publishes creative material and criticism. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics plus film will also be included as well as graphics and photographs.

The editor invites creative and scholarly contributions. The editorial board does not necessarily endorse any political views expressed by its contributors. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with notes gathered at the end, and should conform to the Harvard (author-date) system. Wherever possible the submission should be on disc (soft-ware preferably Microsoft Word) and should be accompanied by a hard copy. Please include a short biography, address and email contact if available.

*Kunapipi* is an internationally refereed journal of postcolonial literature formally acknowledged by the Australian National Library. Work published in *Kunapipi* is cited in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature's Annual Bibliography* (UK), *The Year's Work in English Studies* (UK), *The American Journal of African Studies* (USA), *The Grahamstown Information Journal* (SA), *Australian Literary Studies*, *The Indian Association for Commonwealth Studies* (India), *The New Straits Times* (Indonesia), *The Australian Public Affairs Information Service* (produced by the National Library of Australia) and the *MLA*.

All correspondence (manuscripts, inquiries, subscriptions) should be sent to:

Dr. Anne Collett  
Editor — *KUNAPIPI*  
English Literatures Program  
University of Wollongong  
Wollongong NSW 2522  
Australia

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Individual:	1 year	AUD \$60.00
Institutions:	1 year	AUD \$130.00

Please note that if payment is made in currencies other than AUD\$, the equivalent of \$10.00 must be added to cover banking costs. Cheques should be made payable to Kunapipi Publishing.

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# Kunapipi

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## Acknowledgements

*Kunapipi* is published with assistance from the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies and the European branch of the Association and the Faculty of Arts University of Wollongong.

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Front Cover: Kurt Brereton, 'Kuradjji Embassy No 1' (detail), oil on canvas, 167cm x121 cm, 2007.

Kunapipi refers to the Australian Aboriginal myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol of both creativity and regeneration. The journal's emblem is to be found on an Aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory of Australia.

# Contents

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Editorial, <i>Anne Collett</i>	vi
--------------------------------	----

## ESSAYS

<i>Pamela Mordecai</i> , 'Miss Lou — A Personal Remembrance of Louise Simone Bennett-Coverley: Poet, Folklorist, Community Worker, Lyricist, Stage and Movie Actress'	8
<i>Michael Jacklin</i> , "'What I Have Done, What Was Done to Me': Confession and Testimony in <i>Stolen Life: Journey of a Cree Woman</i> '	19
<i>Dave Gunning</i> , 'Caryl Phillips' <i>Cambridge</i> and the (Re)Construction of Racial Identity'	70
<i>Susan Cochrane</i> , 'Black and White Family Album: A Personal View of My Parents' Work in Papua New Guinea, 1949–75'	81
<i>Detlev Gohrbandt</i> , 'Embracing the Alien Inside: Bessie Head and the Divided Self'	108
<i>Anne Howell</i> , 'The Rhizomatic Art of Kurt Brereton'	121
<i>Joel Gwynne</i> , 'Riley's Handbook: "Exegesis to His Cryptic Utterance"'	137
<i>Tej N Dhar</i> , 'Ngugi's Retrospective Gaze: The Shape of History in <i>A Grain of Wheat</i> '	173

## FICTION

<i>Renate Cochrane</i> , 'Philomena'	98
<i>Gila Tal</i> , 'The End of Jewish Jerusalem'	163

## INTERVIEWS

<i>Michael Jacklin</i> , 'Interview with Yvonne Johnson'	34
<i>Michael Jacklin</i> , 'Interview with Rudy Wiebe'	54
<i>Cara Cilano</i> , "'In a World of Consequences": An Interview with Kamila Shamsie'	150

ABSTRACTS	184
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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS	186
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NOTES ON EDITORIAL ADVISORS	188
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## EDITORIAL

Like so many students who come to Caribbean poetry with the sound and cadence of Shakespeare's sonnets or Keats' 'Nightingale' or Tennyson's 'Lady of Shalott' or Yeats' 'Second Coming', Miss Lou's poetry on the page was a struggle: I couldn't make sense of the words, I didn't have a feel for the rhythms, I couldn't hear it in my head nor give voice to anything but a very bad approximation — I stuttered and stumbled. But then I heard Louise Bennett perform 'Colonization in Reverse' and I was hooked: the wit and the vitality — the pungency — of her verse was an exhilarating experience that encouraged me to seek out more. It was the language of Caribbean english that had me in thrall, and to which I remain a devotee today. I still don't read it well and often feel like a bad imitation of various recordings I've heard over the years, and some live performances; but Miss Lou opened up a new world for me in which I have become a resident, although I have yet to visit the Caribbean. Louise Bennett died in July 2006 but Miss Lou lives on in me as in many others who love her poetry.

Not only the words of Miss Lou, but a recording of Kamau Brathwaite reading 'Nametracks' from *Mother Poem* and a video of a performance of 'Negus'; a tape of John Agard hamming up 'Oxford Don', punctuated by the raucous laughter of colleagues at the University of Aarhus; Mikey Smith talking with CLR James and reciting 'I cayan believe it' in Kingston and Shelley's 'Song for the Men of England' in Westminster Abbey, are part of my treasured collection and staples of my teaching: the tapes are getting scratched and stretched from so much playing, but the voices are unstoppable, speaking across generations and cultures. If I have to admit somewhat shamefacedly to mono-lingualism, at least my native language is multiple and various — my englishes talk to and against each other in my head and in my teaching. The words and lives and histories of others enlarge me and make me what I am as much as the small world of family into which I was born. May all translators be praised for the work they do and the worlds they reveal to me that otherwise would be unknown and largely unknowable. Louise Bennett, Kamau Brathwaite, Mikey Smith and John Agard translate englishes and in so doing they create connection between discrete and separate lives in the english-speaking world. Like all writers, they make the world a bigger and a smaller place.

Reading is a curious and potent thing whose effect, despite a long, intimate and consuming engagement, can still surprise me. Michael Jacklin recently gave a seminar at the University of Wollongong on the collaborative book, *Stolen Life*, by Yvonne Johnson and Rudy Wiebe. Inspired by his paper, I not only encouraged him to submit the essay to *Kunapipi*, but I read the book — or rather I attempted to read the book. I read perhaps two-thirds of the way through and found myself reluctant to continue. This is not a criticism of the quality of the writing, the value of the story, or the capacity of the writers to engage my interest; but rather it is



an indication of the power of the relationship established by the authors between writer and reader. The violence of which the book speaks is so powerful and became so real to me, that I began to feel myself to be a participant in that violence. I felt myself in some way, by the act of reading, to perpetuate abuse through my increasing desire to know more. The more I read the more I engaged in what I felt to be a violence done to Yvonne, by me personally. It was a disturbing experience, because it was not so much disgust I felt for the abuse or the abusers (although I also felt that), but disgust with myself for what I believed to be an indulgence in someone-else's pain. I was an intruder in an intimacy that felt like a violation. I had not experienced this before.

This caused me to reflect not only on the nature of reading as an experience that is more than vicarious but that might have some kind of 'real' impact not only on myself but on others, or on the spirit of others; but also on the effect of the lyrically descriptive passages in the opening chapter of the book, written by Wiebe. As Rudy's voice diminished and the spaces available for contemplation decreased, I began to feel increasingly unable to cope with what I was hearing/reading. Too much was coming at me too fast. I came to recognise the value and perhaps the need for lyrical writing that I had not recognised before. Such writing in an emotionally powerful and demanding text, allows the reader a space in which to breathe, to pause — to reflect. I realised that for me, this was not only a literary need but an ethical one. I stopped reading; but I am determined to continue once I have taken pause for thought. I hope the essay and the interviews Michael conducted with Rudy and Yvonne encourage you to read the book — it is a remarkable personal and literary achievement. I would also ask you to bear in mind that a transcribed interview can never do justice to the interaction that took place between the people involved. Not only are the visual connections missing, but the quality of tone and all the various nuances of verbal expression are also missing. The transcription of an interview can only be a bad translation of the original. On first reading the interviews, I was particularly struck by the closeness of relationship between Yvonne as speaker and writer, and the distance between Rudy's written and 'spoken' voice. This not only says something about the linguistic and literary cultures that moulded them, but also gives you a feel for the differences that are negotiated and bridged in the collaborative act of translating 'a life'.

Anne Collett